

FAMILY ISSUES

The Family as a Unit

Why is a family relationship important to the individual? What are the dynamics of family participation? How does understanding family roles enrich an individual's development? This chapter includes the analysis of the interaction of family members with an introduction of topics such as the development of values, standards, and attitudes; bonding of members; family disagreement resolution; roles in the family network; recognition of parents' rights and children's rights; and birth order position in the family.

The family, which is society's most basic unit, will continue to exist because it meets vital human needs.

Family Composition and Life-style

The traditional nuclear family of a working father and a mother who remains at home with two children is no longer the situation in the majority of families in the United States. Social, economic, and cultural pressures have created a variety of new family groupings. Students should be encouraged to examine these groupings in order to maximize the life-style they may choose or in which they, their families, or their friends live.

In our society the nuclear family and the extended family have been joined by other forms of the family: the single-parent family and blended family. Regardless of the form, the purpose of the family remains the same. The family in American society provides an environment for protection, affection, socialization (education), economic security, procreation, and recreation. Just as an automobile functions to move people from one place to another, the family functions to meet individual needs through the group. Whether your transportation is a station wagon or a motorcycle, its purpose is to get you from one place to another. Whether the family is a single-parent family or blended family, its purpose is to meet individual needs through a group. The family will continue to exist because it meets vital human needs.

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Generalizations

1. The family is society's most basic unit.
2. Individual families reflect unique characteristics in addition to common traits found in other families.
3. Families go through a predictable sequence of development.
4. When young people have a clearer picture of their own family system, they are in a better position to make informed choices about the kind of family they hope to create.
5. Individuals are born into their first family units, but they may be involved in selecting or establishing their second family units.
6. Cross-cultural families may have problems with role expectations, conflicting values, and involvement with parenting responsibilities.
7. A study of family customs would be beneficial in understanding relationships between parents and their children.
8. A child observes and models the behavior of parenting individuals.
9. Time limitations can cause conflict between the demands made by one's employment and the responsibility of raising a family.
10. Parental responsibility for physical care and maintenance changes as the child grows toward independence.
11. The number, placement, and age of family members affect the unit's ability to provide for individual needs.
12. The addition of each new family member has impact on the family group.
13. The number of members in a family unit and the birth order of the individual affect the development of each member.
14. The traditional male role of provider has been changed by the female working outside the home. Some males are not comfortable assuming or sharing the role of managing a household.

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Family Structure

Teacher Notes

Introduce the following concepts:

The family is one of the most important units of the social order, and thus the building block of society.

Strong well-functioning families are important both to the future well-being of the younger generation and to secure the strength of society in general.

Families are different - some have two parents, others have just one parent, while still others benefit from the contribution of extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Go around the room and ask students to describe the structure of their family "triangle." This includes their own family of origin, their partner's family of origin as well as their present family.

• Examples might be:

- a. single-parent family*
- b. extended family*
- c. two-parent family*
- d. adoptive family*
- e. intergenerational family*
- f. blended families*

It is important to remember that in these lessons the goal is to develop the students' capacity to clarify their behavior and that of their children, and to reflect on their past and present experiences.

Take the lead by using your own experience as the first example.

It is very important to explore the similarities and differences between the participants' family of origin, their parents' families of origin, and their present family. It is suggested that you discuss whether or not "Gang" is replacing the family.

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Gang as a Family?

Teacher Notes

The objective of this exercise is to discuss the dysfunction of having "the gang" replace the family. Expound on how gangs fulfilled some familial need (or is the family).

Have students write an essay how gangs have replaced the father figure in the home. Students should address how gangs provide comfort, security and emotional fulfillment for its members. In addition, discussion about re-focusing on the family should occur and ways in which children can be directed toward the family instead of away from it.

It may helpful to show the video "South Central" or another video dealing with gangs replacing the father. It is imperative that this theme be self evident and that the film conclude with positive outcomes.

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The Family As A Unit of Cooperation

Assignment:

1. List three positive parental roles.
2. Explain how your future parenting role will be different from and similar to your own parents' roles.
 - a. Different:
 - b. Similar:
3. Explain why household responsibilities should not be labeled as masculine or feminine.
6. Give one example of sex stereotyping found in the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or books).
7. List two examples of how sex stereotyping might limit a child's potential.
8. List two ways you can avoid sex stereotyping with children.

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Attitude and Belief Check

Since we are all raised in a family of one form or another, we all have attitudes and beliefs based on what we learned through our experiences. Sometimes our beliefs are so routine that we simply don't think about them every day.

Go through the list below and indicate whether you feel the statement is true or false. Put an "X" in the appropriate column under the "T" for True or under the "F" for False.

Compare the list with that of the students in your class. More importantly, compare the reasons for your answers. While often the answer is the same, the reasons will vary greatly.

T	F	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	a. If children in a family have the same parents, the children will be alike.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	b. An only child is lonely.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	c. The youngest child is usually a leader.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	d. The middle child is oftentimes a good negotiator.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	e. Later-born children tend to be more friendly and less demanding than firstborn.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	f. The youngest child is likely to learn to walk, talk, and read earlier than his or her older siblings.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	g. The oldest child tends to be an underachiever.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	h. Firstborn children are more likely to be better students than later-born children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	i. Children born second have a tendency to be nonconformists. (They do not do what society expects of them.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	j. No one birth order position is necessarily better than another.

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Four Stages of the Family Life Cycle

The first family stage is the *beginning family*. This is the time from marriage to the birth of the first child. During this time the couple learns to adjust to marriage or living together and to each other. The young couple may face conflicting loyalties between parents and spouse, or the husband or wife may feel guilty about spending little or no time with his or her parents.

The second family stage is the *growing family*. This is the period from the birth of the first child to the time when the last child starts school. This is a busy time for parents; the addition of a baby and/or small children means more time is required for child-care, cooking, and laundry. Childhood illnesses and accidents are at a peak in these years. Income is often scarce, and saving money is difficult. Parents may want to take part in PTA, scouting, and church work and to continue personal interests of their own. Often the husband and wife find it difficult to have much time for each other. It is important at this stage that they do not neglect their own relationship.

The third family stage is the *launching family*. This period includes the time when the youngest child enters school until all of the children have moved out of the home. During these years the children are growing up and are old enough to share activities and discussions with the parents. As the children approach the teen years, the family faces new kinds of situations: dating, driving, and curfew and decisions about future education and jobs. The parents must be both understanding and firm.

The fourth family stage is the *couple again*. The children are gone from the home, and the husband and wife must adjust to this change. Their children's needs and wishes are not their primary focus. They can develop their own hobbies, interests, and social life. Their expenses are less since there are just two to support. The couple must look ahead and plan for their retirement.

Exceptions and/or Additions to the Family Life Cycle

Some families do not have children; so they do not follow this four-stage pattern. Some people may marry someone who has children from a previous marriage and thus skip the beginning stage. Some families may be in more than one stage at a time. For example, if the family is large, it might be in both the growing and launching stages at the same time. The couple again stage may be changed by launched children moving back home. Some couples assume the care of grandchildren while their children return to school or work. Some couples move into the home of their grown children for health, financial, or companionship reasons. Although these four stages do not fit every family, they do fit many.

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Beliefs about the Family

Assignment

Teacher Notes

Read each statement to the class and have them decide whether they agree or disagree. If they agree have them place an "X" under the letter "A" in the column to the left of the statement. If they disagree, have them place an "X" under the letter "D" in the column. If they are not sure, have them circle the statement.

This assignment may be completed again at the end of the class in order to measure the degree of change in student attitudes.

<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	a. The main purpose of a family is to raise children.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	b. Disagreements in a family are unhealthy.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	c. Family customs and rituals are important.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	d. Your family has borrowed customs, ideas, food, or other tools from other cultures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	e. Your family is patriarchal.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	f. Your family is matriarchal.

*The following page is set up as a handout for this assignment.

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Beliefs About the Family

Assignment

If you agree with the statements below, put an "X" under the letter "A"; if you disagree put an "X" under the letter "D". If you are not sure, circle the statement.

<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- a. The main purpose of a family is to raise children.
- b. Disagreements in a family are unhealthy.
- c. Family customs and rituals are important?
- d. Your family has borrowed customs, ideas, food, or other tools from other cultures.
- e. Your family is patriarchal.
- f. Your family is matriarchal.

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Functions of the Family

The family serves many basic needs of its members. The family provides the following six functions:

Care

Providing a physical (shelter and clothing) and emotional (guidance and reassurance) environment in which family members feel safe.

Education

Making family members knowledgeable regarding the laws and customs of the community.

Financial support

Providing an economic base to meet the needs of the family members.

Love

Feeling tenderness and emotional attachment for family members.

Recreation

Participating in leisure activities together as a family (shopping, entertainment, and sports).

Reproduction

Producing family members through birth or adoption.

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Functions of the Family

Assignment:

1. Match the behaviors below to the functions they meet. Write the function on the line in front of the behavior.

Choose from these six functions

Care
Education
Financial support
Reproduction
Recreation

Functions

Behaviors

- | | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | a. Jose earns \$8 an hour to support his family. |
| _____ | b. Paul showed his little brother how to brush his teeth. |
| _____ | c. Sandy locked the doors when she left for school. |
| _____ | d. Andy planned the food for a family Love picnic. |
| _____ | e. David and Janet's first child was a boy they named Alex. |
| _____ | f. Debbie patted her sister's back after she completed her competition. |

2. Describe things you did as a family member within the last six months. Indicate which of the six functions each activity fulfilled.
3. Which two of the six family functions are most important to you in your family today?

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Family Structure and Atmosphere

The composition of a family, that is, who the members are and what roles are assigned to them, determines how the child is brought up. There are challenges to raising children that only come up for certain families as a result of their structure.

The family atmosphere is the pattern of relationships that exists among members of a family. It is important for family members, especially parents, to make an effort to build positive family relationships. To a great extent, our family atmosphere is adapted from the atmosphere that existed in our original families when we were growing up. This in turn is incorporated into a new atmosphere when we marry and have our own children.

Take a memory trip back in time to when you were growing up. Share what the atmosphere in your family was like. For example,

Responses might be:

Competitive
Cooperative
Frightfully
Hostile

Permissive,
Chaotic
Supportive,
Strict

1. What are the special challenges confronted by a single parent of today?
2. How are those challenges different if the single parent is a man? A woman?
3. What role do grandparents play in your children's lives?
4. What unique conflicts can arise in intergenerational families?
5. What roles do other extended family members play in your children's lives?
6. If you had a problem, to which family member would you turn for advice or help?

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Family Atmosphere

Mutual Respect

It is acknowledged that some of this material challenges traditional parenting principle ways. We are not trying to condemn the old ways, but are pointing out that many of those ways no longer work.

- What is meant by mutual respect?
- Do you allow your children to make mistakes without ridiculing them?
- When you take a child on an errand, do you explain where you are going?
- When your child makes a suggestion, do you consider following it?
- Do you treat your children with the same courtesy that you use with friends or strangers?
- If a friend were to spill a drink on your sofa, how would you react? If your child did the same thing, how would you react?
- What words do you use when you are angry with your children?
- Do you knock on your children's bedroom door? Do you expect them to knock on your door?
- Do you do things for your children that they can do for themselves?

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Family Atmosphere

Working and Playing Together

- Parents should spend some time with each of their children each day doing something they both enjoy and have planned together.
- The important thing about your time with your children is not *how much* time you spend together but how you spend that time together.
- From sharing tasks and games with their parents and siblings, children will learn to cooperate, share, and to work in teams.
- Do you spend some time each day with each of your children doing something you both enjoy?
- Do you have fun as a family at least once a week?
- How are family fun times planned?
- Who plans the fun times?
- How many hours a day do your children spend watching television?
- How many hours a day do you spend talking to your children?
- Do you have family rules? How are they established?
- Does everyone in the family have household chores?

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Family Atmosphere

Encouraging and Building Self Esteem

- We must believe in our children if they are to believe in themselves. To feel adequate, children need frequent encouragement.
- We need to encourage the positive efforts made by our children and not focus on the end result, which may or may not be positive. This means that parents should recognize children's assets and strengths, while minimizing their weaknesses and mistakes.
- Do you give frequent encouragement to each child, recognizing his or her effort rather than the result?
- When your young child dresses by himself/herself and doesn't coordinate the colors correctly, how do you react?
- When your child helps you clean, but doesn't quite finish the job, how do you react?

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Family Atmosphere

Communicating Love

- To feel secure, children need at least one significant parent (or caregiver) to love and be love by.
- It is important for parents to tell their children that they love them.
- Do you tell your children that you love them, especially when they are not expecting it?
- How do you express love in nonverbal ways?
- When was the last time that you expressed your love to each child?
- Do you sometimes express love to your children as a reward for something they did right?
- Do you sometimes withdraw expression of love as a punishment?

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Family Atmosphere

Assignment

Participate in a discussion with parents about their family atmosphere using the following questions:

1. Did you feel comfortable in the atmosphere of your original family?
2. How was your family atmosphere different from that of your partner/spouse?
3. What kind of family atmosphere have you created for your children?
4. How is the atmosphere that you created similar to or different from the atmosphere in which you grew up?

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Family Atmosphere

Assignment

Write down 20 ways to build a happy Family Atmosphere; in other words, ways to develop positive family relationships.

Now, prioritize your suggestions into the following subheadings:

Mutual Respect	Taking Time to Work and Play together
Encouraging & Building Self-Esteem	Communicating love